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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Gaza Crisis

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that IDF reservists were involved in the fighting in Gaza yesterday, for the first time since Israel launched Operation Cast Lead 16 days ago. Akin to other media, The Jerusalem Post reported that senior Israeli diplomatic officials told the newspaper yesterday that while diplomatic efforts were picking up

speed, Israel was likely to QexpandQ its operations in Gaza before agreeing to a withdrawal and cessation of operations against Hamas. The Jerusalem Post reported that the IDF is said to be carving out a Qsecurity zoneQ along the border, which it would retain even after an end to the fighting and use to conduct routine patrols aimed at halting rocket attacks against the South. Maariv cited Israeli assessments that Hamas will launch long-range missiles at the end of the operation.

HaQaretz quoted sources close to PM Ehud Olmert as saying yesterday that he continues to disagree with DM Ehud Barak and FM Tzipi Livni regarding the question of continuing the warfare in Gaza. The QtroikaQ met yesterday to discuss the subject, and both Barak and Livni reportedly argued for ending Operation Cast Lead as soon as possible. This is apparently the reason Olmert wants to present the issue to the security cabinet, where the majority supports his view.

Livni contends that continuing the offensive could harm the deterrence it has achieved so far and damage Israel diplomatically. Barak objects mainly to inserting ground troops deep into densely populated areas of Gaza. For his part, Olmert told the full cabinet Sunday that stopping Operation Cast Lead now would be a missed opportunity. Israel Radio reported that Amos Gilad, who heads the Defense Ministry's political-security bureau, will not leave for Cairo today.

Media cited an assessment in Jerusalem that Hamas has been badly beaten and bruised, but that it is not yet willing to wave the white flag of surrender. The media reported that yesterday IDF tanks and infantry units pushed deeper into Gaza City, encountering fierce Hamas resistance and killing, according to the military, close to 50 Hamas operatives. Earlier in the day, the IAF bombed the home of Ahmed JaQabri commander of HamasQs military wing. JaQabri was not believed to be home at the time. The media reported a rift between Hamas-Damascus more confrontational political leadership and the movementQs Gaza leaders, who are reportedly more inclined to reach a cease-fire.

Yesterday leading media cited a New York Times report published on Saturday that President Bush deflected a secret Israeli request last year for bunker-busting bombs for a possible attack on IranQs main nuclear complex.

Over the weekend leading media reported that Israeli officials are accusing Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of having worked behind Israel's back and of having been the "engine" behind the wording of the UN Security Council's resolution, contrary to the promises that she gave to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that an Egyptian government official told the daily yesterday that Iran is exerting heavy pressure on Hamas not to accept the Egyptian proposal for a cease-fire with Israel. Leading media reported that the Egyptian Foreign Ministry called IsraelQs Ambassador to Cairo for clarifications regarding the humanitarian condition in Gaza.

Leading media quoted President-elect Barack Obama as saying yesterday on ABC-TV's "This Week." that the suffering of civilians on both sides makes him Qmuch more determined to try to break a deadlock that has gone on for decades now.

Over the weekend major media reported that for the second time in two days, the US Congress on Friday overwhelmingly backed a resolution supporting IsraelQs military campaign against Hamas.

HaQaretz quoted the IDF as saying yesterday that IDF video clips documenting the war in Gaza and showing preparations for combat were the fourth most-popular videos on the video-sharing Web site YouTube as of last week, and some have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times.

Leading media reported that yesterday the Jerusalem District Court ordered Meir Abergil and Israel Ozifa, two Israelis allegedly involved in smuggling 100,000 Ecstasy pills into the U.S. in 2003 to be released to house arrest, ruling that the evidence presented in

an American extradition request "is not sufficiently strong."

Major media reported that QWaltz with Bashir,Q the animated documentary about Israeli soldiers and their memories of IsraelQs 1982 war with Lebanon, won a Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

Gaza Crisis:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QBarack Obama will not be in a hurry to cast a veto for Israel's sake. Israel should become involved in this process and not be seen as the disturbed child of the international community.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIsrael would have preferred to act with the support of those who claim to back our right to self-defense. In a cynical world, Israel must press ahead without it.

The Jerusalem Post editorialized: Q[The Free World states] may be ungrateful, but Israel is fighting their fight too.

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QIn my eyes, the IDF is not an army of war criminals. Nevertheless, the images from Gaza are worrying.

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote on his Web site Gplanet.co.il: QIt is no longer Khaled Mashal, it is Iran, whose leaders, in effect, are forcing him, an expatriate Palestinian, to accept their dictate.

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QWhy, in God's name, are European states] allowed to fight thousands of kilometers from their countries, to kill hundreds and thousands of innocent civilians, and to say that their fight is justified -- but Israel mustn't? Whence do they draw the impudence?

Block Quotes:

II. "CondiQs Revenge"

Veteran journalist Hemmi Shalev wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (1/12): QFour factors combined to bring about the United StatesQ abstention regarding the fighting in Gaza: the pressure of the European states; the distress of the moderate Arab states; President George BushQs desire to pass on a Qtabula rasaQ to incoming President Barak Obama; and Secretary of State Condoleezza RiceQs final blow, which left a taste of bitter revenge.... What might not have sufficiently been taken into account is the Qspecial relationshipsQ not only with Israel, but with countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, which form a pro-American, anti-Iranian front in the Arab world. Since the start of Operation Cast Lead those countries have awarded a surprising dose of freedom of action to Israel in the dialogue with Hamas, but at the same time they have taken care to clarify to Washington that this wasnQt a free lunch, especially with the growing number of pictures of slain Gazan children on TV.

II. "Israel Goes It Alone"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/12): QThe world must be wondering, 17 days into Operation Cast Lead, why it is taking so long for Jerusalem to cave into pressure for a cease-fire in Gaza. From the UN Security Council, that renowned bastion of international probity, and the constellation of Muslim, Arab and non-aligned states to our unwavering European allies, the international community -- and much of the media -- wants Israel to stop fighting. We Israelis can hear these erstwhile friends in Europe and the media saying: QEverybody is wrong, and you alone are right.Q They continue: QYes, Israel has a right to self-defense --

but must your IDF kill innocent civilians and destroy buildings in the process? Can't your tanks avoid harming them? Your failure to fight a war that is televised live, 24/7, without spilling blood has enraged the Arab street. We don't want this fury turned against our interests in the Middle East.... The New York Times, likewise, sympathizes with Israel's predicament but worries that trying to wrest Gaza from Hamas's grip will complicate the efforts of the incoming Obama administration to broker peace.... Israel would have preferred to act with the support of those who claim to back our right to self-defense. In a cynical world, Israel must press ahead without it.

III. "Abnormal State"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/12): QWho complained to the United Nations Security Council about the firing of Qassam rockets by the Hamas government in Gaza? The government of Israel.... And when, over Israel's objections, that very council passed Resolution 1860 calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, who proclaimed that it would not accept it and intended to continue fighting? The government of Israel, of course.... Israel wants the international community, represented by the Security Council, to protect it from Hamas, Syria and Iran, but not to hamper the Israel Defense Forces operating with all its strength in Gaza. The problem is that the international community rejects this arrangement and wants to intervene even when it hampers Israel.... In eight days, a new president will move into the White House, one obligated to strengthening the influence of international institutions. Barack Obama will not be in a hurry to cast a veto for Israel's sake. Israel should become involved in this process and not be seen as the disturbed child of the international community.

IV. "The UNQs Hollow Gaza Resolution"

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/11): QThere can be nothing more valid or just than Israel's security cabinet's pledge to press on with the Gaza operation regardless of UN disapproval. It is exactly as the Prime Minister's statement encapsulated: QIsrael has never agreed that any outside body would determine its right to defend the security of its citizensQ.... Disconcertingly, Resolution 1860 was adopted overnight Thursday by a 14-0 margin. Jerusalem was given cause to expect an American veto, but the U.S. chose instead to abstain because, according to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, it awaited Egyptian mediation results. Rice apparently had no quarrel with the resolution's content and emphasis, regarding it as a QRoadmap for a sustainable, durable peace in Gaza.Q Hence Israel may well expect increased pressure to halt its operation regardless of ongoing Hamas aggression -- wan diplomatic lip-service against Gazan Qassam and Grad barrages notwithstanding. Although the resolution clearly obligates Israeli forces to withdraw, and although much of its text is devoted to the welfare of Gazans, it does not so much as mention Hamas and its relentless terrorist predations on Israelis.... Ceasing fire while Hamas retains a sizable arsenal, while Iran stands poised to rearm it, and while the Philadelphi Corridor remains breached, constitutes a surefire recipe for new and bloodier rounds. This would be disastrous not only for Israel but for those Free World states whose delegates cast anti-Israel votes at the Security Council. They may be ungrateful, but Israel is fighting their fight too.

IV. QThe Whole Land Is Filled with Flags

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/12): QAs someone who supported the operation from its beginning, I have been following its development with concern. I am afraid of an entanglement that will lodge Israel in Gaza for months and years.... I fear the harm caused to civilians in Gaza. The Second Lebanon War was mainly conducted in an area free of civilians. Only Hizbullah guerrillas were left in it. The Gazans have nowhere to run. In time of warfare, it is very difficult to separate between non-involved civilians and Hamas militiamen. The figures that the IDF publishes on this matter raise question marks. How many of the 800 or 900 Palestinians killed until yesterday were Hamas fighters? Does a postal clerk in the Hamas government also deserve to die? A traffic cop? Ha'aretz correspondent Amira Hass wrote that it was good that her parents had died and were not compelled to see Israel's crimes

in the operation in Gaza. As opposed to her, I am sorry that my parents have passed away, but this is not the only point on which we disagree. In my eyes, the IDF is not an army of war criminals. Nevertheless, the images from Gaza are worrying. There is nothing joyous, nothing patriotic, about a child killed by a shell or a family buried under a home. Hamas may not care about them: We should care.

VI. QIran Seeks To Wear Out Israel in QNon-Negotiations

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote on his Web site Gplanet.co.il (1/11): QAbu Mazen's consent is now saving Hamas, i.e. leaving it as the ruling power in Gaza, albeit weakened, opening the crossings and introducing international supervision in the Rafah crossing. Had Hamas agreed to this, the cease-fire would be achieved, and it would retain a minimum of dignity--after all, it will now be recognized, by Israel as well, as the force controlling Gaza de facto. But no, it is the usual Palestinian maximalism. It is all or nothing -- so nothing. The reason is different this time. It is no longer Khaled Mashal, it is Iran, whose leaders, in effect, are forcing him, an expatriate Palestinian, to accept their dictate.... The Palestinians in Gaza have now become Iranian currency in Tehran's long-standing war against Israel. QKeep fighting,Q they are commanded from Tehran, from afar. QKeep dying.

VII. QShut Up and Let Us Work

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/11): QThe countries of Europe, in the current time and on a weekly basis, cause innocent people's deaths. That awful killing has a justification: the fight against the Taliban. So we don't need to explain anything to Europe. They need to explain this to us. After all, the Taliban hasn't fired rockets at any cities in Europe. Hamas fires at Israel. The Taliban hasn't declared its desire to annihilate all the Europeans. And Hamas actually does encourage the killing of Jews in its charter and in its spokesmen's statements. Nevertheless, the Europeans feel it justified to remain in Afghanistan only in order to eradicate yet another link in fanatical Islam. Just like Israel with Hamas. And, in any event, Hamas's threat to Israel is greater than the threat posed by the Taliban to Europe. So why, in God's name, are they allowed to fight thousands of kilometers from their countries, to kill hundreds and thousands of innocent civilians, and to say that their fight is justified -- but Israel mustn't? Whence do they draw the impudence?

CUNNINGHAM